

We Claim:

1. A computer generated graphical user interface for accepting user input commands comprising:
  - a first area containing a plurality of menu items; and
  - a second area that includes an icon selected from a set of icons based on the location of a pointer relative to the menu itemswherein the graphical user interface is part of an operating system shell.
2. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 1 wherein the first area is a start menu.
3. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 2 wherein the icon is an animated icon.
4. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 3 wherein the animated icon appears as hovering over at least a portion of the start menu.
5. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 3 wherein the animated icon is three-dimensional in appearance.
6. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 5, wherein the hovering icon comprises a three-dimensional appearing object located in the shell namespace.
7. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 4 wherein the animated icon further appears reflected in the start menu to give a further three-dimensional hovering effect.
8. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 7 wherein the animated icon appears as rocking from side-to-side.
9. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 8 wherein the animated icon rotates based on the movement of the pointer.

10. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 3 wherein the animated icon is contextually related to an item in the start menu over which the pointer is located.

11. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 10 wherein the contextually related animated icon provides an indication of an action that will occur if the menu item is selected.

12. The computer generated graphical user interface of claim 2 wherein the icon is located immediately adjacent to the start menu.

13. A method of providing visual feedback in a graphical user interface with a menu with a plurality of displayed menu items, each menu item being associated with an icon, comprising the steps of:

receiving user input that causes a pointer to be located over a menu item;  
in response to the user input, displaying the icon associated with that menu item  
wherein the graphical user interface is part of an operating system shell.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the icon is an animated icon.

15. The method of claim 14 wherein the menu is a start menu.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the animated icon is contextually related to its associated menu item in the start menu.

17. The method of claim 14 wherein the displaying step further comprises:  
an introduction animation element that causes the animated icon to move and flip;  
a looping animation; and  
an ending animation that changes the icon back to its original appearance.

18. The method of claim 13 wherein the animated icon is a predefined object type in the shell namespace.

19. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for providing visual feedback in a graphical user interface with a menu with a plurality of displayed menu items, each menu item being associated with an icon, by performing the steps comprising:

receiving user input that causes a pointer to be located over a menu item;  
in response to the user input, displaying the icon associated with that menu item  
wherein the graphical user interface is part of an operating system shell.

20. The computer readable medium of claim 19 wherein the icon is an animated icon.

21. The computer readable medium of claim 19 wherein the menu is a start menu.

22. The computer readable medium of claim 19 wherein the animated icon is contextually related to its associated menu item in the start menu.

23. The computer readable medium of claim 19 wherein the animating step further comprises:

an introduction animation element that causes the animated icon to move and flip;  
a looping animation; and  
an ending animation that changes the icon back to its original appearance.

24. The computer readable medium of claim 19 wherein the animated icon is a predefined object type in the shell namespace.

25. A computer generated user interface for accepting user input commands comprising:

a menu divided into a first section and a second section each section including a plurality of menu items;  
wherein each menu item on the first section is configured to call an operating system specific function.

26. The computer generated user interface of claim 25 wherein the second section of the menu comprises a menu item that is configured to call a software application that is not an operating system specific function.

27. The computer generated user interface of claim 26 wherein the menu is a start menu.

28. The computer generated user interface of claim 27 wherein the operating system specific functions include at least one virtual object of a shell namespace.

29. The computer generated user interface of claim 28 wherein the first section comprises:

- a first subsection with menu items to launch some operating system specific functions;

- a second subsection that expands to provide access to all operating system specific functions.

30. A computer generated user interface for accepting user input commands comprising:

- a pointer for selecting menu items and icons;

- a start menu divided into a plurality of sections, at least one of the sections containing only operating system specific menu items;

- an animated three-dimensional appearing icon that moves side-to-side so that the users can see the edges rotating and changes its appearance based on the menu item over which the pointer is located;

- wherein the appearance of the animated three-dimensional icon is contextually related to the operating system specific function called by selecting the menu item.

31. The computer generated user interface of claim 30 wherein the side-to-side movement of the three-dimensional appearing icon is determined in real-time in response to a movement of the pointer.